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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 07 KABUL 005584

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/FO, SCA/A, S/CR, SCA/PAB, S/CT, EUR/RPM
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR AID/ANE, AID/DCHA/DG
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OSD FOR KIMMITT
CENTCOM FOR CFC-A, CG CJTF-76, POLAD

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [MARR](#) [EAID](#) [AF](#)
SUBJECT: MUSA QALA AGREEMENT: OPPOSING INTERESTS AND
OPPOSING VIEWS, BUT ONE WAY FORWARD

REF: A. KABUL 4369
[1](#)B. KABUL 5388
[1](#)C. KABUL 5399
[1](#)D. KABUL 5442
[1](#)E. KABUL 5452

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald Neumann for Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Two delegations of Helmand Province elders and residents affected by the Musa Qala Agreement, each reflecting opposing forces fighting for control of the district, offered PolCounselor and Lashkar Gah PRTOFF very different assessments of the impact of the Agreement. The first group, representing the Local Administration (LA) established by the Agreement, were adamant that no Taliban remained in Musa Qala. They defended Governor Daud, said they would welcome development assistance, training for their locally-established police force, and visits by outside government authorities. They would not commit to deferring to central government authority, accepting other than locally-hired security forces, or supporting eradication (and particularly spraying) as a means to address the poppy problem in Helmand. The second group, some of whom were former Musa Qala officials who claimed to have been driven out of town for opposing the Agreement, asserted the LA represented the interests of smugglers and drug lords and operated at the pleasure of the Taliban. They hold Governor Daud responsible for the Agreement and demanded his dismissal. They claimed to welcome poppy eradication and the return of ISAF (they specified U.S. Forces) and central government authority. They share what they see as President Karzai's view -- that the preferred solution to Helmand's problems would be the return of former Governor of Helmand (and warlord) Sher Mohammed.

[1](#)2. (S) Senior UNAMA and EU officials argue the LA should be given the opportunity to prove it can hold the Taliban at bay. They support testing the LA's willingness to accept central government authority, but also highlight Taliban violence, tribal warfare, and the absence of any effective governance in Musa Qala prior to the Agreement. There are mixed views within the GOA itself. There is concern,

expressed by President Karzai personally (Ref B), that the Agreement gives poppy growers the time they needed to get this year's crop in the ground. We continue to argue against further agreements until it is established that the Musa Qala Agreement will not lead either to expanded Taliban influence or greater resistance to central government authority. This includes the introduction of outside security forces. Assistance channeled through official channels will also reinforce central government authority. Meanwhile, an agreement approved by tribal leaders in Khost Province on November 23 offers potentially another model, whereby the local population works with Afghan security forces to deflect Taliban influence (Septel). End Summary.

Two Delegations and Two Stories from Musa Qala

13. (SBU) On November 9 and 12 PolCounselor and Lashkar Gah PRTOFF met with two groups of Afghans from Helmand Province to discuss Musa Qala Agreement (Ref C). The first delegation, representing the newly-established Local Administration (LA) in Musa Qala, defended the agreement. The second included officials and individuals driven from Musa Qala as a result of their opposition to the Agreement as well as representatives from other Helmand districts, including three women -- one a member of the Wolesi Jirga, another of the Helmand Provincial Council. They asked that the Agreement be rolled back and not replicated elsewhere. The two groups agreed that the Agreement resulted from the inadequacy of the combined ISAF-Central Government response in the face of the months of violence, which one elder characterized as &bloodshed, brutality and losses.8 They

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offered different assessments of the role the Taliban is currently playing in Musa Qala and of the steps needed to normalize governance in the troubled district.

Facts on the ground: Who,s really in control?

14. (SBU) Representatives of the Local Authority (LA) established as part of the Musa Qala Agreement (Ref C) used their November 9 meeting at the Embassy with the PolCounselor and Helmand PRTOFF to defend the Agreement and ask for support for local security forces and development projects. Haji Sha Agha, who highlighted his services at Afghanistan's constitutional jirga, spoke on behalf the ten-member delegation. He reported strong local support for the LA, underlined that the Afghan flag is flying over the district center, noted that schools and mosques have opened, and invited international community, central government representatives, and journalists to visit Musa Qala. &Our doors are open, our district is open.8

15. (SBU) PolCounselor underlined U.S. support for developments consistent with the Afghan constitution and laid out the criteria that we would use to assess the Musa Qala Agreement. First, it must not facilitate Taliban presence or influence in the district. Second, it must lead to expressions of central government authority in the district -- for example through the introduction of police drawn from outside the district. As a complement to this second point, assistance to the district would be channeled through the government. The U.S. would not recognize or support an independent local authority unwilling to accept central government authority.

16. (SBU) Agha was adamant in assuring PolCounselor there are currently no Taliban in Musa Qala. He said that, prior to the Agreement, there had been two types of Taliban in the district: foreign and local. The foreigners had been driven out, and the local Taliban had agreed to remain outside an exclusion zone 10 kilometers from Musa Qala. Local police,

whose wages were paid by LA members and had three weapons between them and no vehicles, were providing security. The district had welcomed the Governor's offer of Ministry of Interior training for this 60-member police force and appealed for assistance to build clinics, roads, and wells.

¶7. (SBU) In the November 12 meeting, Abdul Wali Kawka, the former Chief of Police of Musa Qala speaking for the delegation of ten who are opposed to the agreement, painted a different picture. Kawka scoffed at assertions there is a ten-kilometer Taliban-free zone around Musa Qala, claiming the Taliban maintains a jail one kilometer from the district office building and has monitors in the town. The delegation claimed that, following the Agreement, two elders and a mullah who had objected were beheaded, with the latter's body being dragged through town. They produced a packet of receipts issued at 'toll points' set up around Musa Qala, Naw Qala and other districts, stamped with the authority of the "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan." (Note: Translated text of receipts e-mailed to SCA/A. End Note) Kawka's delegation insisted that LA officials operate at the pleasure of the Taliban and have no authority beyond the doors of their homes. The three women in the delegation claimed that the situation of women in particular had become more difficult since the agreement. They reported they had received telephone threats warning them not to return to Helmand from Kabul.

The Flag Flies, But Is The Government Welcome?

¶8. (SBU) Both groups went on record as supporting the central government, but each had its own ideas on how the

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government should assert its authority. While reiterating the Afghan flag flies in Musa Qala and welcoming visits, training, and assistance, Agha made it clear the LA is not prepared, at least at this point, to cede authority over the police or other functions to the central government. Pressed about whether the LA will accept security forces from outside the district, Agha hedged. He said the LA would welcome Ministry of Interior training for local security forces, but resisted the idea of outside police in Musa Qala. (Note: The first round of training for the Afghan National Auxiliary Police has commenced in Helmand. The next two rounds are expected to include locals from Musa Qala. End Note.) Agha allowed that "in the long run⁸ the district would send its guards to serve elsewhere and would bring outsiders in. At this point, he said, the LA is focused on two things: obtaining training for the local security force and working on the &big, important project⁸ of negotiating with local Taliban in the hope that, "in the long run,⁸ they will put down their weapons and join the government. While the LA is currently holding its own, it would not hesitate to call on ISAF for assistance if that were needed.

¶9. (SBU) Speaking for the Agreement's opponents, Kawka denounced not only the LA, which he described as made up of smugglers, thieves, and drug lords, but also Governor Daud, whom he accused of being "weak and a pro-Taliban thief." Kawka derided the LA's refusal to allow Afghan National Police (ANP) in Musa Qala, and also the exclusion of ISAF and non-Afghan assistance organizations. What is needed, he said, is a central government authority strong enough to stand up to the Taliban and the drug interests Kawka claimed were backing the LA. He reported on the delegation's recent meeting with President Karzai.

What do these groups want for Helmand?

¶10. (SBU) Agha and the other representatives from the Musa Qala LA were focused on consolidating their authority in Musa

Qala. Infusions of assistance for the locally-hired police and social projects were their first priority. The delegation expressed hope that other districts would follow Musa Qala's example. Agha claimed that he and others are working with leaders from other districts, including Naw Zad and Sangin. He said they have Governor Daud's support.

¶11. (SBU) Kawka's delegation highlighted their concern that Musa Qala serves as a dangerous precedent for other districts. Kawka focused on Governor Daud's role in the process, noting that, when Governor Daud took power last December, the government operated in all thirteen districts. Less than a year later the government barely controls three. Kawka's delegation was adamant that Daud must be removed. Asked who they wanted as a replacement, they resisted offering a name, but did outline what they were looking for. The qualifications ("a strong figure, someone from Helmand, drawn from the muhajadin, who would lead the battle -- show the people how to fight") suggest ex-Governor (and warlord -- removed early this year at the insistence of the international community) Sher Mohammed would be top of the list. The delegation left a copy of the demands that they had presented to President Karzai (see para 20 for text; copy of original e-mailed to SCA/A). They include ISAF's return, with Kawka saying they hoped for U.S. rather than British troops.

What To Do About Helmand's Poppy Problem

¶12. (SBU) Musa Qala is not the center of Helmand's poppy production, but, according to the UNODC, in 2006 cultivated 6,371 hectares of opium or 9.2 percent of the poppies grown in the province. The delegation from the newly-installed

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Local Authority acknowledged that poppy production poisons the community, but insisted that the only effective antidote was to build a small local irrigation dam which would allow farmers to grow other crops. Agha rejected the possibility of eradication, claiming it would impoverish local farmers (and blamed spraying for poor wheat crops in the province over the past year). Kawka's delegation painted a different picture, at one point claiming that "those who are the LA are just there to plant poppies." Kawka charged that part of the earnings from poppy production made possible as a result of the Agreement would be shared with the Taliban. The delegation repeated to the Embassy its demand (made in the written demarche to President Karzai) for a poppy eradication program -- targeted at both large and small growers and complemented by redevelopment assistance.

UNAMA and EU Views on Musa Qala

¶13. (SBU) UNAMA and EU officials in Kabul highlight the violence and lack of governance in Musa Qala before the Agreement and contrast it with the stability since. They point to other provinces (EU Deputy Michael Semple cites Kunar) where they say tribal leaders have an understanding with government authority which allows them to function largely autonomously. UNAMA Deputy SRSR Chris Alexander urges that the LA be given time to prove it can operate independently of the Taliban and respond to the local community's needs. He agrees with the need to test the Agreement, both by pressing for the introduction of Afghan National Security forces drawn from outside Musa Qala and also by requiring that all assistance to the district be channeled through central and provincial government institutions. Neither UNAMA nor the EU highlights the role of poppy cultivation in the district.

Comment

¶14. (S) Long-term tribal competition, warlord influences, the recent Taliban insurgency, central government weaknesses, ISAF miscalculations, and the interests of poppy growers all contributed to the situation that led to the Musa Qala Agreement. The situation post-Agreement is, at best, ambiguous. While the community is enjoying relative calm, the Afghan flag is flying, and mosques and schools (reportedly only for boys) are opening, some assert the Taliban are allowing these developments. On November 8, Foreign Minister Spanta told Assistant Secretary Boucher he was still uncertain whether the agreement was with elders or with the Taliban (Ref E). Others ask the same question, and there is nervousness, particularly in Kandahar Province, that the Agreement signals a willingness on the part of the government to make concessions to the Taliban. In a conversation with the DCM on November 26, Deputy NSA Ibrahim acknowledged there is an uncertainty about the Taliban's role, but also highlighted the government's weak position. He noted the Agreement was the result of the local community being fed up with corrupt governance and violence, and he expressed hope that, with support, the LA will be able to function independently from the Taliban. Finally, while not widely discussed, there is also concern, including on the part of President Karzai (Ref B) that the relative calm produced by the agreement was deliberate -- creating a window to allow this year's poppy crop to be planted.

¶15. (S) President Karzai is not happy with the Agreement, but we would not be prepared to accept his alternative. He has linked the deterioration of the security situation before the Agreement to the removal of former Governor Sher Mohammed and told NSA Hadley that, if the international community had allowed it, he would have reinstalled Sher Mohammed to bring the situation back under control (Ref B). As Governor, Sher

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Mohammed was in fact able to keep the province somewhat quiet, but he was also a ruthless and corrupt warlord. There was no governance presence in southern Helmand during his period in control, and there is evidence that his misgovernance and favoritism pushed opponents into joining or rejoining the Taliban. While his supporters give him credit for keeping the Taliban in check -- and blame Daud for failing to do so, others argue that spike in Taliban activity was a reaction to aggressive British operations earlier this year rather than Sher Mohammed's departure. We continue to make it clear that sending Sher Mohammed back is not an option.

¶16. (S) It would be difficult to find someone acceptable to replace Daud as Governor at this point, and that gives him certain leverage with the central government. He is reportedly talking to other districts about similar arrangements, and, in a recent meeting with President Karzai, said he would not return to Lashkar Gah until Sher Mohammed's brother, Amir Mohammed, was removed as Deputy Governor. Satisfied with Karzai's promise that he would do so, Daud returned to Helmand before coming to Kabul to participate in a meeting with Prime Minister Blair on November 20. Karzai told Ambassador Neumann that Amir Mohammed would be removed, but only after Karzai is able to negotiate some form of compromise between supporters and opponents of Sher Mohammed.

¶17. (S) Although Governor, Daud does not control most of the province. The Southern border districts are currently under Taliban control. The fact that Daud is prepared to sign Musa Qala-like agreements in other districts in the north of the province highlights his tenuous hold on even those areas. Given the pressures he faces, he may find it hard to resist doing so, but we will continue to argue that there should be no more agreements until it has been established -- by deliberate testing -- that the Musa Qala agreement does not allow the Taliban authority or enhanced influence in Helmand and that the central government will be able to assert it

authority the district -- including by the introduction by Afghan National Security forces from outside the district. We will look for ways to offer much needed assistance to the community -- using government channels -- to reinforce the importance we attach to the institutions set up under the constitution. (Note: The UK Ambassador Evans has shared that the British have quietly made available to the Governor funds for the rebuilding of mosques in Musa Qala. End Note) Finally, we will argue that Musa Qala should not be given immunity from counternarcotics initiatives undertaken in Helmand Province. If the Musa Qala LA is able to work within these requirements, it could serve as a bridge toward normal governance in the district. Meanwhile, an agreement approved by tribal leaders from across Khost Province offers potentially another approach whereby the local population can work with Afghan security forces to deflect Taliban influence (Septel).

¶18. (S) CFC-A Comment: The current situation in Musa Qala could be viewed as an opportunity to test the Agreement by increasing investment in those areas that are antithetical to the Taliban aims) schools for all children, clinics, roads, government centers. Pressing ahead quickly with construction of such facilities and confirming that the citizens really are providing the protection as promised is one way we can be more assured that the agreement is sound and achieving the desired state. Governor Daud has provided a list of projects requested by the Musa Qala Local Authority. Unfortunately, we know of no development work by the GOA or NATO-ISAF or the international community yet underway, since the agreement was reached. One goal could be to separate the moderate Taliban and their opportunistic supporters from the extreme leadership. But there are fewer and fewer indications that the Agreement has exposed a true seam.

¶19. (S) CFC-A Comment Continued: NATO-ISAF sees some benefit of the Agreement in freeing up previously fixed UK

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forces to maneuver and fulfill other pressing operational requirements in an AO that lacks enough forces. Regardless, as time goes by, the agreement's larger strategic impacts beg louder and louder for the agreement to be tested. COMISAF is developing a plan to do so. It will likely include asking for pressure on Governor Daud to fulfill those aspects of the agreement not currently being enforced, and injecting reliable security forces into the area. Current intelligence indications point to significant Taliban presence and influence in Musa Qala, and Musa Qala being use as a waypoint for movement of insurgents. In a broader sense, we remain concerned, however, that such a locally-devised agreement is having negative strategic repercussions on President Karzai and the GOA. Militarily, we believe the Alliance needs to pursue a campaign that maintains pressure on the enemy. END CFC-A COMMENT.

¶20. (U) What follows are the 13 demands presented to President Karzai (as provided in English -- with some editing to facilitate understanding) by the delegation opposed to the Musa Qala Agreement. Begin Text:

&These are our demands of all heads of districts and Chiefs of police to President of Afghanistan

In our opinions these are very important things and best ways for bringing security in Helmand province which we have mentioned below.

- Governor of Helmand province Mohammad Daud must (be) removed from governor post.
-) In those districts which have been occupied and controlling by Talibans in during this year period, the government should do a big operation to capture those districts again so NATO forces and national army as well as national police should take part together in this operation.
-) The (current) Helmand Chief of Police and Chief of

Administration must be removed from posts.

) In every districts we should have fifty elders council from different tribes. The government should provide their expenditures.

) We should open courts in all districts to bring justice properly and give punishment to criminals.

) The government should select as Governor and Chief of Police as well as Chief of Administration for Helmand province persons know the culture tradition of Helmand people. That person should have experience about military affairs and should have big personalities.

) Every district should have 200 police. The government should give salary and materials to these police on the exact time it is due. Heads and chiefs of all districts should be responsible for selecting good persons as police.

) The NATO forces should control the border areas in Helmand province. NATO forces should destroy the Al-Queda and smugglers centers in border areas. NATO forces should follow or control the areas using helicopters or aircraft in border areas. NATO should have airbases in sandy region.

) Poppy should be eradicated in all districts. In eradicating opium officials should not discriminate between poor and rich persons. The government help people, including with financial assistance and begin reconstruction in every district.

) Helmand Province needs a trained stand-by force in headquarters to help police in serious situation.

) There should be held in every province a session in headquarters quarter every month. Ten elders of every district should participate in this session to discuss all issues. The government should compensate these elders expenditures.

) The NATO forces and national army should take part in every operation with national police.

) In every district there should be a propaganda department, with clerics managing and arranging the programs. The government should give high salaries to members of this department.

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(Signatures of approximately 30 elders followed the text)
NEUMANN